

Issue 1

December 2003



Environmental Public Health Tracking Program  
Utah Department of Health

UTAH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

# EPHTP Newsletter

Keeping EPHTP stakeholders informed.

## EPHTP Background

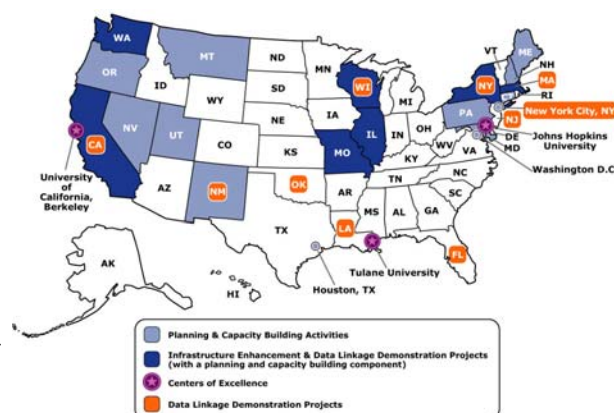
The environment plays an important role in human development and health. Researchers have linked exposures to some environmental hazards with specific diseases. One example is the link between exposure to asbestos and lung cancer. Another example is the link between exposure to lead and decreased mental function in children. However, other links remain unproven, such as the suspected link between exposure to disinfectant byproducts and bladder cancer.

In January 2001, the Pew Environmental Health Commission issued the report "America's Environmental Health Gap: Why the Country Needs a Nationwide Health Tracking Network." The report, which stated that the existing environmental health system is neither adequate nor well organized, recommended the creation of a "Nationwide Health Tracking Network for disease and exposures."

Currently, no systems exist at the state or national level to track many of the exposures and health effects that may be related to environmental hazards. In most cases, existing environmental hazard, exposure, and disease tracking systems are not linked together. Because existing

systems are not linked, it is difficult to study and monitor relationships among hazards, exposures, and health effects.

In 2002, Congress provided CDC funding to begin developing a nationwide environmental public health tracking network and develop capacity in environmental health within state and local health departments. Utah was one of 20 states and 3 schools of public health funded to develop an EPHT network.



Visit CDC website:  
[www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/default.htm)

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### Meetings and Important Dates:

- *National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) Conference December 3-5, 2003 Atlanta, Georgia*
- *2nd Policy Workgroup Meeting December 10, 2003 10:30-12:30 UDOH, Room 201*
- *2nd Technical Workgroup Meeting December 17, 2003 10:00-12:00 UDOH, Room 114*
- *4th Planning Consortium Meeting January 14, 2004 10:00-12:00 UDOH, Room 114*
- *EPHTP Partners Meeting March 24-26, 2004 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

## Updates: Policy Workgroup

The first meeting for the Utah Policy Workgroup (UPW) was held on October 29, 2003. The UPW tasks will evolve as the program focus changes. The tasks will include completion of a needs assessment, develop environmental public health indicators (EPHI) etc. The initial task of the policy workgroup is working on the needs assessment.

The goal for the policy workgroup is to determine state and local needs relating to the development and implementation of the Utah EPHTP. The purpose of the needs assessment is to gather information to identify, prioritize, and document relevant needs.

The policy workgroup was given 4 action

*Next meeting*  
**December 10, 2003**  
**10:30-12:30**  
**UDOH, Room 201**

items to work on until the next meeting.

1. *Review goal and objectives.*
2. *Review the list of EPHTP partners and let us know if we are missing anyone. Other organizations or programs we should be including.*
3. *Rank and prioritize both environmental and health issues.*
4. *Review the summary of the needs assessment and provide comments. List any potentially useful secondary data sources.*

For more information contact Kori Gunn. EPHTP Community Health Specialist, at (801) 538-6191 or email: [kgunn@utah.gov](mailto:kgunn@utah.gov).



## Technical Workgroup

The first meeting of the Utah Technical Workgroup (UTW) was held on October 29, 2003. The UTW was formed to identify, develop, implement, and promote standards and other mechanisms to support data sharing and network development.

The work plan was finalized in the Technical Workgroup meeting. Related programs were reviewed such as National Environmental Information Exchange Network, National Electronic Disease Surveillance System, Indicator Based Information System for Public Health, and Rapid Inquiry Facility.

The objectives for the UTW are to 1) Identify the technical standards that will impact EPHTP

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networking, 2) Identify the relevant surveillance systems that are related to environmental hazard, environmental exposure and health effect, 3) Develop a plan for the enhancement of the prioritized surveillance systems, and 4) Develop a conceptual data model and documents of Utah Integrated Data Repository (IDR) in next year.

The next UTW meeting will focus on identifying the technical standards that will impact EPHTP networking.

For more information contact Mei Xue. EPHTP IT Analyst, at (801) 538-6191 or email: [mxue@utah.gov](mailto:mxue@utah.gov).



## Resource for Genetic and Epidemiologic Research (RGE)

Jean Wylie, Director of RGE gave a presentation on RGE at the 3rd planning consortium meeting held on October 7, 2003.

RGE was created in 1982 by Executive Order of the Governor as a data resource for collecting, storing and disseminating medical and other data for use in reducing morbidity and mortality. With access to a variety of databases and 25 years of experience in data linkage, the RGE has proven a valuable resource for the EPHTP.

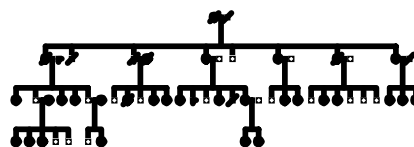
The EPHTP is collaborating with RGE in developing a prospective pilot project. Jean Wylie, Director of RGE, attended the 3rd PC meeting to help familiarize consortium members with RGE.

RGE data are stored in the Utah Population Database (UPDB), which includes genealogy records, birth records, fetal death records, death records, cancer records, HCFA follow up records, driver license records, and University Hospital records.

This data exists in separate and linked tables and is used for statistical, epidemiological, and genetic research.

RGE governs access to the data used in biomedical/public health research. Access is allowed on a project-by-project basis, and every project must also have separate Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. RGE reviews projects annually and all parties with access to the data are required to sign a confidentiality agreement. For profit entities may not have access to identifying information from the database.

Visit RGE website: [www.research.utah.edu/rge/](http://www.research.utah.edu/rge/)



The value of linking data: familiarity & disease

# Asthma Data Linkage Project

To supply the planning consortium members with an example of a data linkage project, Dr. Wayne Ball provided a presentation on the Asthma Data Linkage Project at the 3rd planning consortium meeting. The project was funded under ATSDR (Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry) and completed in 2002 by Dr. Ball and his Environmental Epidemiology staff at the UDOH. The project objective was to examine spatial and temporal variation of childhood asthma risk in the urban counties along the Wasatch Front; cases included in the study were hospitalized cases in children up to 14 years of age during the period of 1990-1999.

Asthma cases were geo-coded and examined for clustering based on several spatial statistical methods. When clusters were identified, researchers attempted to identify emission sources within the clusters. Since there were too many different sources of emissions, and since there were limitations due to data resolution, researchers could not associate any one source

with a particular cluster. Despite this, researchers found that a higher number of emissions sources per area was indeed a predictor of increased risk of asthma. As expected, other variables such as income, education, house age, house value, and family size were also risk factors.

Researchers were able to conclude that (1) the density of hazardous emission sources in a census tract or in a given area is predictive of increased asthma hospitalization rates, small families with low education level; (2) lower income families and older housing pose the highest risk; and (3) those indicating maternal smoking during pregnancy were at increased risk.

The project used ecological methods to identify high-risk populations, and once populations are identified, public health efforts can be focused on areas at greatest risk.



## Question and Answer

- How will the new HIPPA law affect gathering information?

*Many activities of the health department, and this program in particular, are exempt from the HIPPA law. We may run into problems during the development of the EPHTP but we are working with CDC and the other grantees to develop a formal message we can use to relay the exemption. We will update the planning consortium with any developments regarding EPHTP an HIPPA.*

- How will the information be distributed?

*The Utah EPHTP is in the planning and capacity building stage of the network and that being so, issues such as dissemination of information are still being assessed. The aim of the Utah EPHTP is to create a web-based data linkage program with varying accessibility for the public, the local and state health*

*departments, and agencies outside the state.*

- When do you expect to have the databases linked?  
*The planning and capacity building stage started in 2002 and ends in 2005. At that time, we expect to progress to the enhancement and demonstration project stage. Prior to 2005, we expect to have a pilot project in place.*
- Will the local health departments and other programs have access to the information?

*The local health departments and other programs will have access to the information on the EPHT system. One of the main objectives of the EPHTP is to establish a network, which can be used by local, state, and national health departments to develop public health policies and initiatives.*

**Thank you to all that took the time to fill out the database survey. We appreciate your support and cooperation. Your continued support will help shape the EPHTP.**



## National Environmental Public Health Tracking News

CDC has formed four workgroups to ensure that each grantee and EPHT development coincides with the vision and goals of the national EPHT network initiative. The workgroup members consist of representatives from the CDC and each of the participating states, cities, and schools of public health. Staff members from UDOH participate in each of the workgroups and relay developments to the planning consortium, the technical workgroup and the policy workgroup. The four workgroups are as follows:

### 1. Legislation and Partner Agreements Workgroup (Utah representative Wayne Ball)

Address legislative and policy needs to enable development and implementation of a statewide and national Environmental Public Health Tracking Network.

### 2. Program Marketing Workgroup (Utah representative

### Kori Gunn)

Assist CDC and other cooperative agreement recipients in development and implementation of a program marketing strategy.

### 3. Data Linkages Workgroup (Utah representative Gambrelli Layco)

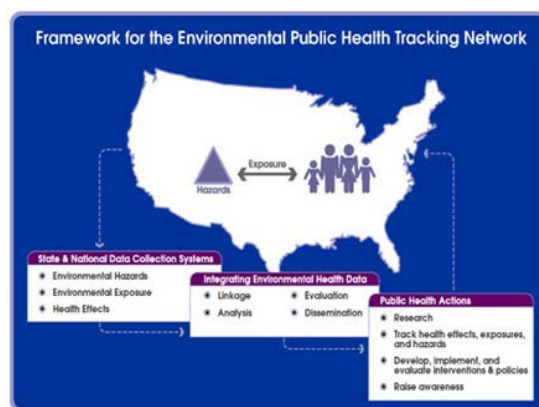
Compile and share "best" and "worst" practices that have been utilized in linking health/hazard/exposure data.

### 4. Standards and Network Development Workgroup (Utah representative Mei Xue and Mark Wensel)

Ensure collaboration with CDC and other partners on development of the EPHT Network as it relates to the Network functions, requirements, and data and information technology specifications.

### *In the next EPHTP Newsletter:*

1. *Updates from the 2nd meeting of the Technical and Policy Workgroups.*
2. *Updates from the December meeting.*
3. *Geostatistical Analysis training.*
4. *Updates from the 4th Planning Consortium Meeting.*
5. *Preparing for the March 2004 meeting.*



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**Check us out on the web!**

**[www.health.state.ut.us/els/epidemiology/envepi/activities/ephttp.htm](http://www.health.state.ut.us/els/epidemiology/envepi/activities/ephttp.htm)**



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